

HR Weekly Podcast
07/24/2008

Today is July 24, 2008, and welcome to the HR Weekly Podcast from the State Office of Human Resources. This week's topic concerns flexible work schedules.

Last month, Utah's Governor Jon Huntsman signed an executive order that requires the majority of Utah's state government employees to work a four-day workweek, Mondays through Thursdays. This new initiative is known as Working 4 Utah. With this new work schedule which will begin in August of 2008, Utah becomes the first state to go to a four-day workweek. Affecting about 17,000 out of 24,000 executive branch employees, the executive order will not cover state police officers, prison guards, or employees of the courts or Utah's public universities. In addition, state-run liquor stores will remain open on Fridays.

Turning off the lights, the heat, and the air conditioning on Fridays in 1,000 of 3,000 government buildings will save about \$3 million a year out of a state budget of \$11 billion, according to the governor's spokeswoman, Lisa Roskelley. The state also expects to save on gasoline used by official vehicles.

According to Jeff Herring, executive director of Utah's Department of Human Resources Management, there are four goals for Utah's four-day workweek initiative. The first goal is to reduce energy costs. Utah's governor also wants to increase energy efficiency. In addition, state officials hope the new initiative will have an environmental impact by reducing the number of vehicles on the road. And, finally, Utah hopes the new four-day workweek will benefit employees by cutting their fuel costs and providing longer weekends. Utah will evaluate the new work schedule for a year and determine whether to extend it.

Because of the current economic downturn and expected \$4-a-gallon gasoline, many states are looking at cost-saving measures. These measures could include expanded telecommuting, compressed workweeks, and more flexible schedules.

South Carolina Code of Laws §§ 8-11-15 and 8-11-17 authorize state agencies in South Carolina to vary an employee's work schedule through the use of alternative scheduling strategies, including telecommuting, to better meet the needs and service requirements of the agency. State Human Resources Regulation 19-707.01 addresses hours of work for state agencies and provides that "[g]enerally, the core hours that an agency shall remain open for business are 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday."

As a result of these South Carolina statutory and regulatory provisions, state agencies have flexibility in establishing their employees' work schedules to better meet the needs of the agency while complying with the required core hours. Agencies should ensure appropriate staffing levels and core hours of operation are maintained by alternating employees' flexible time away from the office.

Given the current economic conditions, many state agencies are piloting flexible work arrangements for employees. The University of South Carolina is piloting a flexible work schedule that will maintain regular hours of operation on all campuses while providing relief to employees from rising fuel costs. Options at the University include: working a four-day workweek, working from home or from an alternate work site, or working a flexible schedule during a five-day workweek, such as working 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. or 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. In addition, the South Carolina Department of Transportation rolled out a similar pilot program earlier this month that offers staggered four-day workweeks for employees in exchange for longer work days. The Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation offers flexible work schedules and a compressed workweek to its employees, plus about a fourth of its employees telecommute. Also, the Department of Revenue allows its employees to have flexible work schedules, including staggered four-day workweeks.

While addressing economic and budgetary issues over the next several months, many states will be reviewing their policies relating to telecommuting, compressed workweeks, and flexible schedules to better manage budgetary limitations. Please visit the Office of Human Resources' website for additional information on flexible work options and how to implement a policy in your agency.

If you have any questions about this topic, please contact your HR consultant at 803-737-0900.

Thank you.